

NBC-TV

7:00 P.M.

Arms Control Verification

BROKAW: On Special Segment tonight, Verification: The countdown to Geneva. It's a key word in every arms control negotiation. In plain language, it means knowing whether the other side cheats.

NBC News Pentagon correspondent Fred Francis reports that with secret, high-technology spying, we know almost everything that the Soviet Union does.

FRED FRANCIS: The SR-71, the Blackbird, the fastest, highest-flying airplane in the world, with a set of cameras that can record photographic, infrared, and radar images.

And here, hidden in the Northern Virginia woods 15 miles south of the White House, a secret satellite ground station that receives a continuous stream of photographs from space.

And in Groton, Connecticut, Sturgeon Class submarines prepare for classified missions near Soviet naval bases. There they will take periscope photographs and record the sounds of Soviet subs.

And in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, another secret base that, among other things, monitors Soviet naval communications down to the walkie-talkie level.

Together, at ten billion dollars a year, it's a dizzying array of airplanes, submarines, satellites and radar, all making sure the Soviets keep their treaty commitments.

Mostly, though, we rely on photographs. Twenty-two times a day a Keyhole 11 photo-reconnaissance satellite scans the Soviet Union. In a few hours its pictures can be

flashed onto a screen at the Pentagon or put on the President's desk. They are computer-generated pictures of remarkable clarity, detailed enough to examine a tank, as in this simulation.

JOHN PIKE: You'd be able to spot something about the size of a grapefruit or a softball from an altitude of perhaps 80 or 100 miles.

FRANCIS: Only a handful of these satellite photos have ever been made public. This one of a Soviet aircraft carrier was taken from a slant angle 504 miles to the south of the shipyard.

WILLIAM COLBY: We don't trust them any more than you'd trust a secondhand car dealer. You watch it like a hawk. You do your own inspections. You check it over very carefully.

FRANCIS: Carefully means using more than photographs. When photo satellites detect Soviet launch preparation, that word is relayed to the National Security Agency outside

Washington. It alerts listening posts around the world.

Above the Soviet Union, satellites aim their sensors. In Turkey, the Air Force eavesdrops on the countdown. And around the Pacific, electronic equipment on remote islands, aboard converted 707s, and on a tracking ship await the splashdown, all recording electronic information.